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In This Issue

"Does Sontag sense no irony in getting a prize premised on the recipient's sensitivity to issues of human freedom, in a society where the freedom of Palestinians is unrelentingly repressed? Imagine her bitter words for any writer voyaging to the Serb portion of Bosnia to receive money and a fulsome scroll from Milosevic, praising her commitment to freedom of the individual."

BUSH'S POLITICAL GAS

- Big Coal Battles Natural Gas

COUNTERPUNCH JOURNEY TO DIXIE

- With Volnay at Monticello
- With the Strikers in Gastonia

Stones and Glass Houses

Said and Sontag

Here's a story about what is intellectually respectable and politically safe in this country, and what is not. It concerns two of this country's best known public intellectuals, Edward Said and Susan Sontag.

Though the range of Said's intellectual interests is wide and his writings on history and culture – most notably Orientalism and Culture and Imperialism - immensely influential in the academies, his role as spokesman for the Palestinian national cause is preeminent, never more so than in recent years since the Oslo accords and subsequent rites. Time and again Said has issued acrid critiques of the evolution of the so-called "peace process" and the relentless degrading of Palestinian national aspirations.

First by the mere fact that he is an articulate Palestinian, then by reason of his intellectual distinction and influential roost at the University of Columbia Said has, down the years, elicited truly amazing onslaughts from the irreconcilables who tolerate no questioning of the moral and political propriety of the Zionist cause as applied against the Palestinians on the practical plane by Israeli governments down the years, and as unconditionally endorsed by the United States.

It's a backhanded tribute to his effectiveness as spokesman for the Palestinian cause that the attacks on Said have, across the last couple of years, reached new levels of envenomed absurdity. A couple of years ago the journal Commentary, a shoddy publication sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, published an attack on Said by an Israeli-American called Justus Wiener, with a desk at an Institute in Jerusalem financed by the Michael Milken Foundation.

Wiener's appointed task was to seek to demonstrate that Said had been mostly raised outside Palestine, therefore wasn't really a Palestinian and thus had no standing as a tribune for his people! In fact we noted here of Wiener's interminable diatribe at the time, it was plain that Wiener was in effect trying to portray just the sort of rootless intellectual with shadowy kinships spread across the Levant that was beloved of anti-Semitic pamphleteers in the nineteenth century.

Wiener's mad attack was given wide publicity. There's always space in the US press for charges that Palestinians do not in some mysterious manner "exist", and that therefore by the same token the Palestinian nation cause has no merit. The acme of this mode of abuse was a book accorded immense deference a number of years ago, called From Time Immemorial. Its author, Joan Peters, was wildly acclaimed in publications such as the New York Times for her supposedly learned discovery that by reason of hitherto unknown migratory eccentricities, Palestinians had no secure claim upon the soil of Palestine. Then suddenly the row died away as Peters's "scholarship" crumbled under scrutiny.

The latest storm over Said concerns a trip to Lebanon he took last summer, in the course of which he and his family took the opportunity to visit the recently evacuated "security zone" occupied by Israeli forces. As did many Arabs, the Saids shuddered at the horrors of Khiam prison, built by Israel and used for the incarceration and (subsequently admitted) torture of their thousands of Palestinian and Lebanese captives.

Then the Saids drove to a deserted border post, abandoned by Israeli troops, and now crowded with festive Lebanese throwing exuberant stones at the heavily fortified border. In competitive paternal emulation of his son, Said pitched a stone and was photographed in the act of so doing. You can scarcely blame him for being stunned at the (**Sontag and Said** continued on page 6)

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A CounterPunch Journey

From Monticello to Gastonia and Beyond

By Alexander Cockburn

Bidding adieu to the nation's capital, I head west on 66 past Manassas battlefield, then down Route 29, formerly the old Seminole trail that runs south through Charlottesville. I was hoping to make it in time to visit Jefferson's house, Monticello, which I last saw a decade ago. Among those making their way down this same road two hundred years ago to visit the great man was one of my favorite characters from the revolutionary era, Constantin Francois Volney, whose career is freshly evoked in a wonderful book (of which more here in a future issue) by CounterPuncher and friend Peter Linebaugh and his co-author, Marcus Rediker. It's titled "The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic", recently published by Beacon.

A member of the French assembly who voted to abolish slavery, Volney published "Ruins; Or, Meditations on the Revolutions of Empires" in 1791, republished in English two hundred years later by Black Classic Press in Baltimore. A sample from the famous dialogue between the "People" and the "Privileged Class":

PEOPLE: And what labor do you perform in our society?

PRIVILEGED CLASS: None; we are not made to work.

PEOPLE: How, then, have you acquired these riches?

PRIVILEGED CLASS: By taking the pains to govern you.

PEOPLE: What! This is what you call governing? We toil and you enjoy! We produce and you dissipate! Wealth proceeds from us, and you absorb it. Privileged men! Class who are not the people; form a nation apart and govern yourselves…

PRIVILEGED CLASS: It is all over for us. The swinish multitude are enlightened."

Worldwide, Volney was as big a hit as Tom Paine and more radical. In a year his "Ruins" had been translated into German, English and Welsh. William Blake pored over it. The United Irishmen distributed a chapter from it and by 1797 in Bahia, Brazil, it was in the hands of a mulatto amidst the 1797 conspiracy of whites, browns and blacks.

Volney opposed nationalism, the division of classes and the oppression of women ("the King sleeps or smokes his pipe while his wife and daughters perform all the drudgery of the house"). Like Paine he saw a new age dawning across the Atlantic.

In 1794, amid the rampages of Robespierre's Committee of Public Safety, the guillotine wasn't far from Volney's neck. He landed in prison but was released on 9 Thermidor, same day as Paine, and soon sailed to America, spending the winter of 1795-6 in Philadelphia, across from the African Church which was crowded with refugees from the revolution in Haiti. Then he headed down to Monticello for a visit with Jefferson, later recording his impressions:

"After dinner the master [Jefferson] and I went to see the slaves plant peas. Their bodies dirty brown rather than black, their dirty rags, their miserable, hideous half-nakedness, these haggard figures, this secretive anxious air, the hateful timorous looks, altogether seized me with an initial sentiment of terror and sadness that I ought to hide my face from. Their indolence in turning up the ground with the hoe was extreme. The master took a whip to frighten them, and soon ensued a comic scene. Placed in the middle of the gang, he menaced, and turned far and wide (on all sides) turning around. Now, as he turned his face, one by one, the blacks changed attitude: those whom he looked at directly worked the best, those whom he half saw worked least, and those he didn't see at all, ceased working altogether; and if he made an about-face, the hoe was raised to view, but otherwise slept behind his back."

Volney's was too strong a dram of universalist revolutionary sentiment for the politer element at the time. As Linebaugh and Rediker relate, William Cobbett denounced him as an infidel and a cannibal; Priestley accused him of Hottentotism and John Adams probably had Volney in mind when he complained that the United States was becoming a "receptacle of malevolence and turbulence, for the outcasts of the universe". Jefferson expressed it as his opinion in 1798 that Volney was the main target of the Act Concerning Aliens of 1798, designed to promote "purity of national character", forcing the Frenchman to return to Europe.

But why did Cobbett and Priestley abuse Volney as a cannibal and Hottentot? The Frenchman believed in the grand family of the human race and, well ahead of William Wells Brown and Martin Bernal, held that civilization had begun in Africa: "It was there that a people, since forgotten, discovered the elements of science and art, at a time when all other men were barbarous, and that a race, now regarded as the refuse of society, because their hair is woolly and their skin is dark, explored among the phenomena of nature, those civil and religious systems which have since held mankind in awe."

The Carolinas

Thunderstorms and terrible traffic in the exploding exurbs around Manassas held me up. It was nearing twilight when I passed Monticello. I drove on; 29 became interstate 85 and somewhere around midnight I was in a motel near Gastonia, an old textile town, battleground of famous strikes in the early 1930s, which my father Claud covered for the London Times, just before the Great Crash of October, 1929. Another friend of

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Business Manager
Becky Grant

Design
Deborah Thomas

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

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1-800-840-3683 (phone)
1-800-967-3620 (fax)
www.counterpunch.org

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The Gastonia Gazette ran a front page illustration of a snake coiled around the American flag, with the subtitle, "Communism In the South. Kill It!".

mine, the late Sender Garlin, was there too, for the Daily Worker.

The strikes in the textile mills began in the spring of 1929. Over the preceding decade the textile industry had boomed in the south. Up in the north-east textile workers were earning about $20 a week, as one can learn from Samuel Yellen, in his classic work, "American Labor Struggles". But in the Carolinas wages were running at $7 a week or lower. It was easier to get children into the mills and families were happy to have their kids at work, since their tiny wages were crucial to overall survival. The hours were longer too. In the New England states the legal work week ran at 48-54 hours, in the Carolinas it was 60 and in Alabama, naturally, there was no limit at all. And, of course, in the northeast there was some union presence; in the South, none.

Even in the South, the textile masters were beleagured by over-production and excessive competition by the mid-1920s. So, as always, they tried to hold up profit margins by squeezing more out of their workers. In what was known as the stretch-out they assigned extra looms to each worker, raising the number from 24 to 96. Local strikes began to break out, in the Carolinas and Tennessee. The AFL tried to lend a hand. Five local businessmen in Tennessee kidnapped the AFL leaders and took them across the state line, threatening to kill them if they came back. The labor organizers did return and filed kidnapping charges. The businessmen were indicted, but never brought to trial. The terror tactics had their effect. The AFL men left and never came back.

ENTER THE COMMUNISTS

The Communist Party then sent down a man, Fred Beal, who began to organize secretly among the workers in a Gastonia mill. Soon 2,200 went on strike demanding a 40-hour week, recognition of the union, a minimum weekly wage of $20, plus abolition of the stretch-out. There was a scuffle on the picket line and immediately the governor of North Carolina sent in five companies of the National Guard. The Gastonia Gazette ran a front-page illustration of a snake coiled around the American flag, with the subtitle, "Communism In the South. Kill It!". Handbills were put about, saying "Would you belong to a union which opposes WHITE SUPREMACY". With commendable principle, the Communist union, in contrast to the AFL union, had black and white membership, although the workers in the Gastonia mill were overwhelmingly white.

The strike began to spread from Gastonia to nearby Bessemer City, Pineville and Lexington: 8000 workers were on strike in the Piedmont. A hundred masked men then destroyed the Communist union's hq. The union rented some land and set up a tent city outside Gastonia, protected by armed guards. By now the strike was ebbing and scabs gaining a foothold. On the night of June 7, after a workers' march, Gastonia's chief of police Aderholt and four men tried to invade the tent colony. The strikers demanded to see a search warrant. There was none; then a scuffle; Aderholt fell, fatally wounded.

"DEVILS WITH HOOFS"

Sixteen, including three women, were indicted for Aderholt's murder: overall, eight textile workers, plus Beal and seven others from the North. Amid huge international uproar, the union's lawyers won a mistrial. Now the mill owners got serious. Goons attacked union hq and fired on organizers' cars, killing Ella Mae Wiggins. The trial was reopened against a reduced number, and the local DA denounced "devils with hoofs and horns who threw away their pitchforks for shotguns." He put on a wonderful act for the jury, kneeling on the courtroom floor while holding the hand of a sobbing Mrs Aderholt. After 57 minutes the jury came back and pronounced a verdict of Guilty of Murder in the second degree. The four northerners drew 17 to 20 years each in state prison, with the locals getting shorter terms. No one got into trouble for murdering Wiggins. After the North Carolina Supreme Court upheld the sentences in 1930, all seven men jumped the collective bail of $27,000. Two went into hiding in the US and five, including Beal, escaped to the Soviet Union.

The strike was defeated. Now, amid national outcry, the AFL returned to the battlefield, to see if it could find success where the Communists had failed. The New York Times praised the AFL organizers for their moderation and predicted success. The mill owners were unimpressed, saying they could detect no difference.

On October 1, 1929, within weeks of the great Wall Street crash, sheriff Atkins and heavily armed deputies confronted 250 textile workers in Marion who had just gone on strike. The sheriff threw tear gas, a worker struck him with a cane and then the sheriff and his men poured gunfire into the unarmed throng. Seven fell dead, with no losses to Atkins' forces. The mill owner commended Atkins for efficient use of ammunition, with only 35 bullets unaccounted for.

As he later described it in his memoirs, my father saw "a Presbyterian minister kneeling beside the open graves of the textile workers, trade unionists, shot by the company guards, his hair tousled by the wind, his arms raised above his head and his voice crying: "Oh God, what would Jesus do if He came to Carolina."

Organized labor never did get a foothold in the south in the Thirties, and when the next big opportunity came, in the Civil Rights movement, the AFL declined to initiate an organizing drive because it didn't want to challenge southern racism. These days, of course, the textile masters have found even lower wages overseas.

It was the last lap for my 1972 two-door Imperial, known in the trade as a hard-top convertible. I bought it in the mid-1990s as a memento of post-baroque Detroit, when big cars lost the chrome-bright, joyous flair of the late Fifties, the muscle of the Sixties and simply became big, heavy and overly complicated under the hood. Criss-crossing the country in the high days of drug smuggler profiling I kept getting into pretext stops by cops. So I was going to turn it back to an old friend in South Carolina, from whom I've been buying cars and parts for years, substitute a Ford 350 one-ton truck suitable for hauling a horse trailer.

The Ford 350 looks fine. The cab is "chicken-house brown" as Wilbur had earlier described it to me and it has a huge metal bed, 12 foot by 7. I turn over the '72 which will soon be parted out, though Wilbur says the demand for big old cars is slack. Wilbur and his wife say a prayer for me and I turn the truck west towards Tennessee. CP

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Bush, Byrd and the Stink Over CO2

Political Gas

During the presidential campaign, George Bush said he would move quickly to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from US power plants. And, he added with his customary smirk, "unlike Al Gore, my reductions won't be voluntary. They'll be mandatory."

In early March, Bush's EPA director Christy Todd Whitman reiterated this message in Trieste, Italy, to a gathering of European environment ministers. Whitman's assurances were duly leaked to the press. Editorialists across the country swooned; conservatives, who hate Whitman for her pro-choice views, howled in protest. Then suddenly the plank was sawed off beneath her. Bush said there would be no caps and he instructed Whitman to stop referring to carbon dioxide as "a pollutant".

Whitman had been publicly humiliated, much as her predecessor Carol Browner had been in 1996 when the White House publicly undermined her efforts to impose tougher smog rules. Dick Cheney rolled out of his hospital bed in time to do damage control. Cheney, the former oil man and congressman from Wyoming (a major coal mining state), said the campaign pledge was "wrong from the beginning" and that Whitman was just "being a good soldier" for pushing forward with it.

A lobbyist with the Sierra Club quipped that Bush's flip-flop ended the "shortest political honeymoon in history". Close, but no cigar. That prize goes to Bill Clinton, who within a month of taking office had already caved in on a range of issues, from whale protection and forests, to subsidies for western ranchers and water-mongers. Back in 1993, the turnaround was so stunning that Jay Hair, then president of the National Wildlife Federation, described the experience as akin to "date rape." This time around, we have Carl Pope of the Sierra Club saying "enviromental policy is being taken back to the nineteenth century. Trust Carl, shill for the Democratic Party. Clinton waits till the fifty-ninth second of the fifty-ninth minute of the eleventh hour of his term in power to sign some executive orders on work place safety, mining and water safety, knowing full well that they can be reversed under the terms of a 1996 law instigated by Newt Gingrich that he signed.

What was surprising about Bush's carbon dioxide fiasco is that he ever blundered into the issue in the first place. The credit for that can go to Al Gore. Gore, who Bush's father dubbed the Ozone Man, set himself up as the high priest of global warming. He claimed in his catastrophist tome, Earth in the Balance, that the threat was so dire that a political revolution was called for and that institutions needed to be redesigned to make environmental protection "the central organizing principle of civilization". As the most powerful vice-president in history (prior to Dick Cheney) Gore followed this up by doing next to nothing over the next eight years to address what he had stigmatized as the world's major problem. His inaction made Gore an irresistible target for Bush campaign attacks.

It must be easy for Bush to forgive himself for breaking a promise that he never meant as more than a campaign joke in the first place. What's more: how can Bush be held to a higher standard than Clinton and Gore? And who's going to hold him to it?

The debate over CO2 emissions caps is really a fight between big coal and natural gas.

Surprise: it might be Republicans. Senators Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island and Maine's two senators, Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, said the retreat was a mistake. Collins vows to press forward in the senate with legislation to place mandatory targets on sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, mercury, and carbon dioxide emissions.

Martha Marks, head of Republicans for Environmental Protection, said, "We're really disappointed in the president. But it seems like the wrong forces inside his administration are prevailing." It took four years to hear this kind of criticism of Clinton's numerous retreats from Democrats.

There was even grumbling inside the Bush cabinet, mainly from Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill. The former chieftain of Alcoa is a global warming convert. Some unkind souls point out that Alcoa, in which O'Neill has his $100 million stake, stands to flourish the more that government regs strive to increase energy efficiency and lighten cars. But O'Neill's protests were drowned out by Cheney and Lawrence Lindsey, Bush's economic advisor, who, citing a Clinton-era study by the Department of Energy, warned that sticking with the caps might cost billions of dollars.

Even some of Bush's oldest pals and political backers had urged him to move forward with action on carbon dioxide, most notably fellow Texan Ken Lay. Lay, a Republican loyalist with deep pockets, is the CEO of Enron, the natural gas giant. He had urged Bush to regulate carbon dioxide through a complex scheme of trading credits. Lay and his company had funneled $1.7 million into Republican National Committee coffers during the 2000 campaign.

With Lay, a notorious conservative who has underwritten numerous anti-environmental outfits, we come tp the real power play that's at work. The debate over the CO2 emissions caps turns out to be a struggle between big coal and natural gas. Limits on carbon dioxide will serve to entice utilities and other power users to move away from coal and oil toward cleaner-burning natural gas plants. Indeed one estimate by the Wall Street Journal suggests that the natural gas companies could make more than $25 billion in additional profits over the next 25 years if the carbon dioxide caps are imposed.

Ultimately, the big oil and coal companies prevailed in this civil war. But Bush was able to execute his political pirouette so easily because he enjoyed the discreet backing of three powerful Democrats: senators Robert Byrd of West Virginia and John Breaux of Louisiana and congressman John Dingell of Michigan.

The self-righteous Byrd is the coal's industry's one-man praetorian guard. Congressional staffers say he offered to vote for a version of the Bush tax cut in exchange for pull back on CO2 caps. Breaux is the petroleum industry's dark knight, having served his apprenticeship with former Louisiana Senator Bennett Johnston, now a top oil industry flack. The cranky Dingell, long a virulent foe of clean air rules, carries the load in the House for the Detroit auto manufacturers. The combined might of these three Democrats acts as a kind of political Kevlar jacket protecting Bush from serious damage.

And here's the political moral for the future: the Bush crowd has learned some key survival lessons from the tenure of Bill Clinton. Namely the art of triangulation politics: co-opt centrist Democrats and denounce the others as extremists. The new fusion politics looks a lot like the old variety. CP

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(**Sontag** continued from page 1)

consequences. Throw a rock at a border fence and if you are a Palestinian called Edward Said you'll be the object of sharply hostile articles about the infamous stone toss in the New York Times, face a campaign to be fired from your tenured job at Columbia and – this is the latest at time of writing - be disinvited by the Freud Institute and Museum in Vienna from a long-standing engagement to deliver the annual Freud lecture there in May 2001.

As with the efforts to prove Said was somehow not a Palestinian, these assaults have a humorous absurdity to them. For decades the Israelis wreak mayhem on Southern Lebanon, without no commotion in a US press indifferent to UN resolutions telling Israel to abandon its illegal occupation. Both the Israelis and their Lebanese puppet force harass, torture and kill the inhabitants and demolish their houses. Here in the US there's complicity by the government and either similar complicity or indifference among most public intellectuals. Then Said throws an innocuous stone at the border in understandable exultation at the flight of the occupiers and all hell breaks loose. To its credit, Columbia University stands by him and says the calls for his removal are preposterous and offensive.

What, aside from being an articulate Palestinian, is Said's crime? As he himself has written: while "I have always advocated resistance to Zionist occupation, I have never argued for anything but peaceful coexistence between us and the Jews of Israel once Israel's military repression and dispossession of Palestinians has stopped". Perhaps that's the problem. Said makes a reasoned and persuasive case for justice for Palestinians. He doesn't say that the Jews should be driven into the sea. These, not the fanatics, are the dangerous folks.

Now, as a public intellectual, Said lends his name to a wide variety of causes. He speaks out against injustice as a matter of universal principle, not just for his own people. Bearing this in mind, let us now contemplate the role of Susan Sontag, another public intellectual of great reputation, known for a variety of works down the years including the early books of the Sixties, Against Interpretation and Trip to Hanoi, later works on photography and disease, plus the early 1990s novel The Volcano Lover, and, in 1999, another novel, In America, given the National Book Award last year.

You can pretty much gauge a writer's political sedateness and respectability in America by the kind of awards they reap,

You can pretty much gauge a writer's political sedateness in America by the kind of awards they receive.

and it is not unfair to say that the literary and indeed grant-distributing establishment certainly deems Sontag safe. Aside from the recent National Book Award, she got a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1977, was appointed in 1979 member of the American Academy and in 1990 received the liberal imprimatur of a five-year (and richly endowed) "genius" fellowship from the MacArthur Foundation, which once contemplated giving a fellowship to Said but on one account retreated after furious protests from an influential Jewish board member, Saul Bellow.

Sontag has now been named the Jerusalem Prize laureate for 2001, twentieth recipient of the award since its inauguration in 1963, and the second woman to be so honored, the first being Simone de Beauvoir. The award, worth a rather measly $5,000, along with a scroll issued by the mayor of Jerusalem, is proclaimedly given to writers whose works reflect the freedom of the individual in society. It is presented biennially at the Jerusalem International Book Fair. Past recipients of the Jerusalem prize include Bertrand Russell, Jorge Semprun, Isaiah Berlin, Mario Vargas Llosa, Jorge Luis Borges, J.M. Coetzee, and rather bizarrely, Don DeLillo.

Sontag was selected by a three-member panel of judges, comprised of the Labor Party's Shimon Peres and Hebrew University professors Lena Shiloni and Shimon Sandbank. Peres has been quoted as admiring Sontag's definition of herself: "First she's Jewish, then she's a writer, then she's American. She lives Israel with emotion and the world with obligation." When notified of her latest accolade, Sontag's response was, "I trust you have some idea of how honored and moved, deeply moved, I am to have been awarded this year's Jerusalem Prize".

Sontag is now scheduled to go to Jerusalem for the May 9 awards ceremony, which will be held within the framework of the 20th Jerusalem International Book Fair. One news report remarked that "According to book fair director Zev Birger, events which have blighted tourism in recent months have not adversely affected the publishing world. 'It's business as usual,' he said, noting that checks and hotel reservations were coming in."

Why dwell on the familiar currency of international literary backslapping? We do so to make some points concerning double standards. American intellectuals can be brave as lions concerning the travails of East Timoreans, Rwandans, Central American peasants, Chechens and other beleaguered groups. But for almost all of them the Palestinians and their troubles have always been invisible. The intellectuals know well enough that to raise a stink about Israeli's appalling treatment of Palestinians down the years is to invite drastic sanctions.

It can scarcely be said that Sontag is a notably political writer. But there was an issue of the 1990s on which she did raise her voice. Along with her son David Rieff, Sontag became a passionate advocate for NATO intervention against Yugoslavia or, if you prefer, Serbia. (To put in a good or even a balancing word for the Serbs was of course another rare event in American intellectual life, where almost all liberals became, like Sontag, laptop bombardiers and enthusiastic advocates of NATO's war on Yugoslavia.)

On May 2 1999 Sontag wrote an essay in the New York Times, "Why Are We In Kosovo?", urgently justifying NATO's intervention. "Of course, it is easy to turn your eyes from what is happening if it is not hap-

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pening to you" she wrote. " Or if you have not put yourself where it is happening. Imagine that Nazi", Germany had had no expansionist ambitions but had simply made it a policy in the late 1930s and early 1940s to slaughter all the German Jews. Do we think a government has the right to do whatever it wants on its own territory? Maybe the governments of Europe would have said that 60 years ago. But would we approve now of their decision? Push the supposition into the present. What if the French Government began slaughtering large numbers of Corsicans and driving the rest out of Corsica . . . or the Italian Government began emptying out Sicily or Sardinia, creating a million refugees . . . or Spain decided to apply a final solution to its rebellious Basque population…Is it acceptable that such slaughters be dismissed as civil wars, also known as "age-old ethnic hatreds."

Sontag cannot be entirely unaware that there is a country at the other end of the Mediterreanean from Spain from which a very large number of refugees have been expelled. In 1973 she actually made a movie in Israel, "Promised Lands", filmed in October and November of 1973 after the Egyptians crossed the Suez canal in the Yom Kippur war. Back then, Nora Sayre gave it a politely damning review in the New York Times: "Throughout the ideas and the people and the machines of war are examined from a distance, as though everything had been observed through some kind of mental gauze. The Israelis — particularly those in robes — are filmed as if they were extremely foreign or exotic. Also, Israel seems like a nearly all-male country, since few women appear and none have been interviewed. There are a few sympathetic words for the Arabs, but their existence seems shadowy and abstract — almost as bloodless as the statues in a wax museum devoted to Israeli history."

But surely now Sontag has had time to reflect more deeply on real Israeli Jews, and on real Palestinians. Through the 1990s it became a lot harder than in earlier years for American intellectuals to claim that they did not know what was happening, or were in ignorance of how Palestinians have been treated. The subject became legal tender, even if the currency remained severely limited in fungibility.

Sontag has always been appreciative of irony. Does she see no irony in the fact that

"She lives Israel with emotion and the world with obligation."

she, harsh critic of Slobodan Milosevic, (upon whose extradition to face trial in its Hague Court as a war criminal the US is now conditioning all aid to Yugoslavia,) is now planning to travel to get a prize in Israel, currently led by a man, Ariel Sharon, whose credentials as a war criminal are robust and indeed undisputed by all people of balanced and independent judgement who have bothered to address his conduct in atrocities ranging from Qibya to the refugee camp massacres at Sabra and Shatilla.

Does Sontag sense no irony in getting a prize premised on the recipient's sensitivity to issues of human freedom, in a society where the freedom of Palestinians is violently repressed? To dramatize her support for multi-ethnic Sarajevo, she actually produced a play, Waiting for Godot, in the beleaguered city a few years ago. Imagine what bitter words she would have been ready to hurl at a writer voyaging to the Serb portion of Bosnia to receive money and a fulsome scroll from Radovan Karadzic or Milosevic, praising her commitment to freedom of the individual, and poo-pooing "events that have blighted tourism".

Yet here she is, soon to pack her bags to travel to a city over which Sharon declares Israel's absolute and eternal control, and whose latest turmoils he deliberately instigated by insisting on traveling under the protection of a thousand soldiers to provoke Palestinians in their holy places. Can there be a more searing commentary on all those invocations to toleration and diversity Sontag and the others put forth, accompanied by their strident demands for NATO to drop its bombs on the Serbs?

Does Sontag plan to raise the issue of Palestinians in her acceptance speech? We would like to think so, but somehow we doubt it. She'll scurry in and scurry out, probably hoping not to attract too much attention. When the South African writer Nadine Gordimer was offered the Jerusalem prize a number of years ago, she declined, saying she did not care to travel from one apartheid society to another. But to take that kind of position in the United States would be a risky course for a careful (and by a less obliging token) a timorous intellectual. Said knows he lives in a glasshouse, yet he had the admirable effrontery to throw his stone. CP

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A Candid Peek at Monticello: Jefferson and His Whip

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